

Chairman's Report – 14th February 2019

This week is looking very exciting in Shepton Mallet and we're not just talking about Valentines Day! This weekend we have the return of our popular and now well established Sunday Market, and the incredibly successful Snowdrop Festival, now in its 3rd year.

This celebration of a humble but very special little flower recognises the legacy of Shepton's Snowdrop King, James Allen (1830-1906). This local nurseryman and horticulturalist was the first person ever to breed new varieties from wild snowdrops. His beautiful cultivars are still recognised today as some of the finest varieties in the world.

The Snowdrop Festival begins on Saturday at 10am and will be opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset. The day includes poetry readings and a children's fancy dress competition, and finishes with an event in The Art Bank at 7pm.

The next day we are treated to a special Snowdrop Sunday Market with lots of stalls to browse and buy from. There's a snowdrop church service at 10am in St Peters and St Pauls, and a Gardeners' Question Time at 11am where I'll be part of the panel offering gardening advice.

To remember the life of our famous "galanthophile" (a lover of snowdrops) a walk from James Allen's original home, Highfield House, to his resting place in Shepton Cemetery is planned. To round off the day, there's a talk called The Galanthophiles, celebrating 160 years of our very own Snowdrop King's legacy.

The Town Council has financially supported the upcoming weekend's events from our community grants. This lets us help organisations and groups where there is a direct benefit to the community.

Most planning applications are straightforward and uncontentious, and largely give benefit, or at least do no harm, to our neighbourhoods. The ones that we notice are applications that are contentious and against the best interests of residents and the community. The Town Council's Planning Committee meets regularly to recommend what is best for our town. However all binding decisions rest with the District Council.

One current planning application in Tadley Acres is of concern. The Town Council Planning Committee recommended to Mendip District Council that housing infill development on green space at a Sherrings Road should be rejected. This was because of many concerns including that the land was not allocated for housing, that there were access and parking issues, and there will be a permanent loss to the village feel of Tadley Acres. In glossy sales brochures, Tadley residents were promised "the perfect place for both young and old to enjoy the great outdoors", and many now feel let down by the planners.

Despite the Town Council's recommendation to refuse, it would appear this application is being dealt with as a delegated matter. It means that Planning Officers and Ward Councillors privately give the go-ahead without a meeting of Mendip's Planning Committee to allow the public to have the chance to raise their legitimate objections.

All development must be in keeping with the environment, and our remaining green spaces are precious. No one disputes the need for housing, but the planned extensive development of up to 600 new homes on the Shepton Showground site more than satisfies this requirement.

It is important that people affected by planning decisions can speak openly and see that the quasi-judicial planning process is functioning properly for people to have confidence in it. I can only hope that, at the final hour, this contentious application can be brought back to the District Council's Planning Committee.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council